

## A Comparative Study of John Steinbeck and Takiji Kobayashi

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### Introduction

Proletarian literature— this is one of the points that connect an American writer, John Steinbeck (1902-68) and a Japanese writer, Takiji Kobayashi (1903-33).

I have been studying John Steinbeck for six years, since I was a junior in college. Now for the first time I would like to do a comparative study of the works of Steinbeck and Japanese literature; I will choose a work of Takiji Kobayashi because Steinbeck and Kobayashi were the contemporaries and they both are classified as proletarian writers.

In this papaer I would like to take up Steinbeck's most important work, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1936) and Kobayashi's *Bosetsurin (Snowbreak Wood , 1927)* and study them by the comparative method; there are some noteworthy similarities between these two works. Although I do not have any expert knowledge of Japanese literature, including Takiji Kobayashi, I will try to write this paper as my first introduction to the comparative study of American literature and Japanese literature.

## Chapter 1

To begin with, I would like to mention briefly how *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Bosetsurin* were written from the viewpoint of the authors' background and social background of these days in this chapter.

John Steinbeck was born and grew up in Salinas, a town near the fertile Salinas Valley in California; he spent his childhood there coming in contact with rich nature, animals and flowering plants and observing the life of the farmers. Besides, Steinbeck worked on the ranches and on the road gang during the periods when he had a leave of absence from Stanford.<sup>(1)</sup>

The Great Depression gripped the whole world in the 1930s. In addition to that, the farmers received much damage from the dust storm that began to rage in the Middle West and the Middle South in 1933. Around 1936 Steinbeck actually visited some migrant camps near Salinas and Bakersfield and even lived and worked with the migrant workers in Hooverilles in order to know them and their life; we need to add that Tom Collins, who was a director of the Arvin Migratory Labor Camp, was very helpful to Steinbeck.<sup>(2)</sup> Steinbeck saw the migrant people living in miserable conditions with his own eyes and it drove him to write *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Turning now to Takiji Kobayashi, he was born into a poor family in Akita Prefecture. When he was four years old, his family migrated to Otaru in Hokkaido and opened a small bakery there. In his childhood he helped his father peddle bread about the construction sites, where he discovered that the

laborers were forced to work in severe conditions and to receive cruel treatment.<sup>(3)</sup> He went to school, working at his uncle's baking plant in early mornings and evenings. Besides, while he was a bank clerk at the Hokkaido Takushoku Bank, he saw the laborers working at the canal and warehouses located behind the bank.<sup>(4)</sup> That is to say, there were almost always laborers around Kobayashi.

The labor movement in Otaru reached its peak in the latter half of the 1920s. In 1926 the Hokkaido crops were badly damaged by cold weather, so that labor disputes occurred frequently in every place. The tenant farmers of Susumu Isono's farm in Furano started a big dispute demanding a reduction in rent in 1927 and the dispute ended in the victory of the tenant farmers over Isono. Takiji Kobayashi took part in the dispute: in response to a request from Kiyoshi Takeuchi, the leader of the dispute, Kobayashi provided the side of Takeuchi with information about Isono that he could get at his working place, the Hokkaido Takushoku Bank. Soon after that, Kobayashi gave help to the laborers in the dispute which happened in Otaru harbor, too.<sup>(5)</sup> In consequence of these experiences, he gradually devoted himself to the labor movement. There was another labor dispute in Tsukigata Village in the same year; Kobayashi made the dispute writing material for *Bosetsurin*.

Both *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Bosetsurin* describe farmers who suffer from poverty. These works are based on the facts that the authors observed and experienced in person as mentioned above. Thus we see that their own living environment in their boyhood and experience in their youth particularly had

a great influence on their career as a writer and on their writings. Steinbeck and Kobayashi direct their favorable attention to people of the working class and side with them.

## Chapter 2

Having made sure of some points in common between Steinbeck and Kobayashi, I will now consider the works themselves. In this chapter I would like to take note of the description of nature.

*The Grapes of Wrath* and *Bosetsurin* open by depicting nature, to be exact, the rain:

To the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth.  
(*GW*, Chap.1, p.3) <sup>(6)</sup>

十月の末だつた。  
その日、冷たい水雨が石狩のだだっ広い平原に横なぐりに降つてゐた。  
(*Bosetsurin*, Chap.1, p.239) <sup>(7)</sup>

The above passages are followed by the description that the farmland is being damaged by the drought and the dust storm, and consequently the corn is spoilt in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and that there is nothing special except the farmers' houses in the vast Ishikari Plains and the wide and deep Ishikari River near by in *Bosetsurin*. Many works of John Steinbeck, such as *The Red Pony* (1933), *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *East of Eden* (1952), begin with the

detailed description of nature: in other words, it is one of the characteristics of his writings. Therefore, the beginning of *Bosetsurin* reminds us of the works of Steinbeck.

Here it is possible to propose a hypothesis about the early parts of these two works: several words and phrases imply that the farmers face a difficulty as the story unfolds. Let us examine it concretely.

...they (the rains) did not cut the scarred earth.... The sun flared down in the growing corn....

In the water-cut gullies the earth dusted down in dry little streams. Gophers and ant lions started small avalanches. And as the sharp sun struck day after day...and the sun shone more fiercely. ... The air was thin and the sky more pale; and every day the earth paled.

(Underline mine, *GW*, Chap.1, p.3)

From the above quotation, we realize that the scorching sun is described again and again and emphasized in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Nature brings the blessings to living creatures, but, on the other hand, it occasionally gives them the sufferings of a natural disaster. The tenant farmers' miseries are caused by not only the man-made disasters but also the natural ones, for the drought and the dust storm aggravate ruthless oppression by the banks and the great landowners. Namely, it is certain that the natural disaster is one of the reasons why the tenant farmers are forced to remove themselves from their land and they have to become migrant people. It should also be added that the underlined words, such as "scarred" and "water-cut", give a negative impression.

Next, the early part of *Bosetsurin* will be discussed.

藤吉たちの家は、この吹きさらしの、平原に、二、三軒づつ、二、三軒づつと、二十軒ほど散らばつてゐた。……その中央にある小学校を除いては、みんなの家もかやぶきだつた。屋根が変に傾いたり、庇壁にはみんなひやが人つたり、家の中は、一寸分らない程薄暗かつたどの家にも申訳程位しか窓が切り抜いてなかつた。

(Underline mine, *Bosetsurin*, Chap.1, p.239)

The roofs of the tenant farmers' houses are strangely leaning to one side and the walls of mud all are cracked; this means that the tenant farmers are badly off. The other underlined phrases, "the plains exposed to the wind" and "the dimly lighted rooms" leave a negative impression. Furthermore, the first sentences of the work, that have been quoted before, indicate that the severe winter is coming upon the farmers who are in harsh conditions because of the poor harvest. We can imagine that they work hard and manage to keep body and soul together in the forlorn area.

It follows from what has been said that the openings of both works show plainly the hardness of nature, and, at the same time, they imply many difficulties that the farmers will face by using the words that are suggestive of the dark side of things.

In *The Grapes of Wrath* the Joads and other migrant people go on to California in the heat of the summer. The Joads drive in a worn-out old truck with the bed covered with only a tarpaulin to keep off the sun and the rain; it is the roadside where they have a rest, a meal and a sleep. Namely, they have to endure the heat inside and outside of the truck. In *Bosetsurin* Genkichi and

other tenant farmers meet together in the snowstorm to devise a countermeasure against the landowner. When they try to go to implore the landowner to reduce the rent, they are taken to the police station and investigated with violence by the police; however, Genkichi does not feel frustrated, rather he develops a deep hatred for the landowner on his way home in the snowstorm. The people in both works go through not only unreasonable treatment by the upper class but also the hardships of nature, but still they try to keep taking steps forward to lead a better life. We can safely say that the hardness of nature brings such an attitude of the people into sharper relief.

It is also interesting to note the descriptions of the Ishikari River in *Bosetsurin*.

秋の末の、荒模様の暗い夜に、その川面が、鈍い、然し、底気味の悪い光をもつて流れてゐた。石狩川は昼でも、あまり気持はよくなかつた。  
・・・勝は、今、眼下に、その音をせず、変に底気味のわるい石狩川を見た、身体が瞬間ブルンと顫はさつた。  
(*Bosetsurin*, Chap.1, p.246)

勝は身体が震へてどうにもならなかつた。勝は内心源吉と一緒に来たことを後悔し出してゐた。石狩川には「主」がある、と云われてゐた。  
舟もろとも、渦巻の中にグルグル巻きこまれる。さういふ感じがしてならなかつた。  
(*Bosetsurin*, Chap.1, p.247)

Katsu is frightened of the Ishikari River that has an eerie atmosphere. The river gives Genkichi and Katsu the blessings of many salmon, but, on the other hand, it makes Katsu fearful. Some works of Steinbeck also have similar passages describing people's feelings toward nature. Here I would like to quote from *The Red Pony* and *East of Eden*. Steinbeck refers to the mountains

in these works:

When the peaks were pink in the morning they (the mountains) invited him (Jody) among them: and when the sun had gone over the edge in the evening and the mountains were a purple-like despair, then Jody was afraid of them; then they were so impersonal and aloof that their very imperturbability was a threat. (RP, Chap.2, p.177)

I remember that the Gabilan Mountains to the east of the valley were light gay mountains full of sun and loveliness and a kind of invitation, so that you wanted to climb into their warm foothills almost as you want to climb into the lap of a beloved mother. They were beckoning mountains with a brown grass love. The Santa Lucias...were dark and brooding— unfriendly and dangerous. (EE, Chap.1, p.3)

The little boy Jody in *The Red Pony* and the narrator in *East of Eden* feel a respect and an attachment for the mountains, while the mountains also inspire inexpressive terror, sometimes something akin to awe, in them.

In connection with the description of nature, I will make mention of the animals in the final part in this chapter. Several kinds of animals appear in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Bosetsurin*: a land turtle, a rattlesnake, mice and so on in the former, and crows, roosters, cattle and so on in the latter. It must be noted that people, especially the farmers whom Steinbeck and Kobayashi depict in their works, live in and with nature including the animals and the plants.

Steinbeck asserts that the world consists of the animals and the plants as well as humanity:



Can it be that we do not love to be reminded that we are very young and callow in a world that was old when we came into it? And could there be a strong resistance to the certainty that a living world will continue its stately way when we no longer inhabit it? <sup>(8)</sup>

With reference to the fact that the history of humanity is much shorter than that of other living creatures, he places stress on the point that humanity is nothing but one of the elements in the world. Additionally, he denies the superiority of humanity over the animals saying, "We are no better than the animals; in fact in a lot of ways we aren't as good." <sup>(9)</sup>

In the works of Steinbeck the animals have their own workings of life regardless of humanity's circumstances. Chapter 11 of *The Grapes of Wrath* is a good example to show it: the animals remain in the land where the tenant farmers have been forced out and survive with vigor. We also discover that they are active even if people are still in bed in the early morning or in the late night.

Furthermore, the animals hold the key to understand what Steinbeck wants to express in his work. For instance, a land turtle that appears in Chapter 3 is symbolic of the migrant people. It keeps going ahead however difficult the situation is: such an attitude of the land turtle reminds us of the migrant people in a positive and vigorous attitude in order to survive.

We can recognize from what has been said that the animals play an important role in the works of Steinbeck, but, on the other hand, the crows and the

roosters are only part of the description of the landscape in *Bosetsurin*.

### Chapter 3

Next, this chapter will indicate the farmers' circumstances depicted in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Bosetsurin*. I would like to consider *The Grapes of Wrath* first.

Under the pretext that the farmland is sterile, the banks and the great landowners force the Joads and other tenant farmers out and confiscate their farmland to gain higher profits. The used car dealers and the junkmen also give them a terrible time: the used car dealers sell them a car or truck at a high price, and the junkmen buy their horses, agricultural implements and furniture at a low price.

And the men (Pa Joad, Uncle John and Al) in the seat were tired and angry and sad, for they had got eighteen dollars for every movable thing from the farm. ... Eighteen dollars. They had assailed the buyer, argued; but they were routed when his interest seemed to flag and he had told them he didn't want the stuff at any price. ... They knew the team and the wagon were worth much more. They knew the buyer man would get much more....(*GW*, Chap.10, p.132)

It is absolutely necessary for the tenant farmers to get a car and money to leave for California by selling their property even if they are dissatisfied with the sale price.

The migrant people have to get shabby treatment from the great landowners and the the police in California, too: the great landowners do not intend to spare the migrant people a piece of land at all, although there is a lot of unused land, and besides, they purpose to make the migrant people work at low wages. The police hate the migrant people to settle down, so that they go around or set fire to the migrant camps. Moreover, the number of the migrant people is so large that there are not enough jobs. They continue to look for a job day after day; in the meantime, the money and food are gradually running out. As a result, some people die of hunger, malnutrition or disease caused by insanitary conditions and others, who escape death, lead a cruel life. A man whom the Joads meet on the way talks about his experience in California:

"Sompin it took me a year to find out. Took two kids dead, took my wife dead to show me. ... I can't tell ya about them little fellas layin' in the tent with their bellies puffed out an' jus' skin on their bones, an' shiverin' an' whinin' like pups, an' me runnin' aroun' tryin' to get work...." (GW, Chap.16, p.260)

The Joads are no exception to such a situation: they lose Grampa, Granma and Rose of Sharon's baby and live from hand to mouth, far from obtaining a new farm.

*Bosetsurin* bears a close resemblance to *The Grapes of Wrath* in the reason why Genkichi and other tenant farmers have left Honshu (the main island of Japan) and their circumstances in Hokkaido.

内地では彼等は芋ばかりしか食えなかつた。畑から出来上がったものは安くて、肥料や農具はその倍にもなつた。地主には小作料が、重なりを重ねると、立毛は押さへられた、土地はとりあげられた。「北海道に行つたら」さう思つて、追ひ立てられて、然し、大きな夢をもつて、彼等は「熊が出る」北海道にやつてきた。  
(*Bosetsurin*, Chap.4, pp.259-60)

The tenant farmers have been too poor to pay rent, and finally the landowners have deprived them of tenancy rights; consequently, they have moved from Honshu to Hokkaido in pursuit of a better life. As the Joads have believed that California would be their new Eden, so have Genkichi and other tenant farmers anticipated that they could make money and return to their hometown. However, in reality it is impossible for them to do that.

給つていゝ土地なんか、重箱のふた程も残つてゐなかつた。たまに、安く土地が「給へても」、それを耕してゆく金になかつた。結局人から借つた金でやれば、二、三年経つて、その荒蕪地がやうやく畑らしくなつた頃、そのかたに、すつかり、彼等の手からなくなつてゐた。――こゝも矢張り住みよきはなかつた。  
(*Bosetsurin*, Chap.4, p.260)

There is little land available to them. Even if they manage to get land, they have no money to pay back their debt or part with land in the end because they need to borrow money to cultivate it.

The tenant farmers keep working from morning till night: they are engaged in doing farmwork in the daytime and doing mending and making straw sandals in the house at night. During the winter they work in the mountains and at the fishing ports. Nevertheless, their life does not improve at all; in a lean year they are badly pressed for food.

食べ物なくなつても、地主へ収めるものには手をつけることは出来ず、町へ仕入れにゆくにも金がなくなつてきた。・・・赤子は腹だけが、砂を一杯つめた袋のやうにつつ張つて、ヒイタ泣いてばかりゐた。・・・冬がくる前に、軒につるしておいた菜葉だけを、白湯のやうな味噌汁にして、三日も、四日も、五日も一朝、昼、夜寝け様に食つた。・・・菜葉の味噌汁が、終ひには味がなくて、のどがゼエタと云つた。  
(*Bosetsurin*, Chap.6, pp.264-65)

There is no doubt that exploitation by the banks and the landowners distresses the tenant farmers.

百姓達は、誰のためにも分らずに、色んなものを作つた。が、その半分以上のものは一つ残らず持つて行かれてしまつた。小作人は地主の小作料に、自作農は拓殖銀行の年賦の払込金にそれが成りあがつてしまつた。  
(*Bosetsurin*, Chap.4, p.258)

A Buddhist priest and the police are on the side of the exploiting class. The landowner asks the Buddhist priest to preach a sermon in the village ostensibly for the tenant farmers, but actually for himself. The Buddhist priest gives the sermon that people who are distressed in this world can go to the land of perfect Bliss after death; it prevents the tenant farmers from complaining to the landowner about their destitute life. In addition, to practice faith healing is to make money for the Buddhist priest as can be seen in the following:

坊さんは仔細らしく、お経を口早に、一うそぶくやうに唱へると、数珠をザラタとやつて、せきの肩や、腰などを、それでこすつたり、世でたりした。・・・だから、坊さんは一軒々々廻つて歩くと、その方でも随分金になつた。

坊さんは二日ゐて、一軒々々廻り切つてしまふと歸つて行つた。余程金を懐に入れてゐた。

源吉が畑から歸つてくるとき、その坊さんに会つた。坊さんはどこかこすい、商売人らしく、一寸あいさつをした。

(Underline mine, *Bosetsurin*, Chap.3, p.254)

Having understood the tenant farmers' circumstances, I will now lay

particular stress on the point of how significant having arable land is for the farmers. In the beginning, I would like to take note of the words of a tenant farmer who is threatened with evction one-sidedly: <sup>(10)</sup>

"If a man owns a little property, that property is him, it's part of him, and it's like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it and be sad when it isn't doing well, and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him, and some way he's bigger because he owns it. Even if he isn't successful he's big with his property. That is so." (GW, Chap.5, p.50)

This man speaks for the tenant farmers' conception of having arable land. It makes no matter to them whether their land is rich or poor, large or small. What is important is that they own their land. The land is now part of the tenant farmers because the history of their family is impressed on the land inherited from generation to generation, and because they have been toiling hard on the land to reap a harvest for years. We can imagine that it is humiliating and distressing for them to leave their land. Pa Joad makes his sentiments known to other migrant people at the camp site:

"It's dirt hard for folks to tear up...we was people with a farm."  
(GW, Chap.16, p.256)

The actions of Genkichi's father show his deep attachment to his land; he often goes outside in the middle of the night and looks around his land for one or two hours.

あとで、母はとう々その晩のことをふと、

「馬鹿だなあ」と云つて笑つた。「俺なア、俺アの畑が可愛くてよ。可愛くて、畑、風でもひかなえかと思つてな。」  
そして、真面目に「お前だつて、目さめれば、藤や文が風邪ひかぬえかつて気ばつけて、夜着かけてやるべよ。」と云つた。  
(*Bosetsurin*, Chap.6, p.268)

For Genkichi's father, the land that he cultivates with utmost care is equal to his children. Moreover, there is a phrase, "land that is the tenant farmers' life itself (自分達の命である間)" (Chap.10, p.280) in *Bosetsurin*. It follows that the connection between the farmers and their land is very close in emotional respect.

Furthermore, it goes without saying that land is the basis of their livelihood ("命のもとのやうな土地" (*Bosetsurin*, Chap.6, p.268)): they can work on it and support their family. In other words, it is the absolute basis for happiness.

Unfortunately, the Joads are driven off their land; it means that they have no economic foundation for their living. Hence, it is absolutely necessary for them to get land again in order to regain a stable and peaceful life. The importance of having land and the eager desire to get land are represented in *The Grapes of Wrath* over and over again. This goes for Genkichi and his family as well. They have lost their land in Honshu and acquired land again in Hokkaido. However, their land has become the property of the landowner, and in consequence, they have a lot of trouble with exploitation by the landowner. Genkichi thinks that land should belong to the farmers, because he has known well his father's feelings toward his land and the tenant farmers' difficult

circumstances since childhood.

「畑は百姓のものでなければならぬ。」さう文字通りはつきりとはなくとも、このことは、源吉は十一、二の時から、父親の長い経験と一緒に考へてきてゐた。

・・・「分つてゐるべよ、地主から畑ばとつかへすのさ！」かう源吉が云つたのは、理屈ではなかつた。源吉はさう背後で云はせる父親の気持ちも感じてゐたのだ。

(*Bosetsurin*, Chap.6, pp.268-69)

Viewed in this light, it is clear that the upper classes, such as the banks and the great landowners, take advantage of the farmers' helpless condition and cruelly oppress them. The wrath against them flames in heart of the migrant people and the tenant farmers; as it grows, they unite in confronting the upper class.

#### Chapter 4

Finally, I would like to focus on the main characters in each work and discuss the process that they try to iron out difficulties.

It is Jim Casy, the former preacher, in *The Grapes of Wrath* and a schoolmaster in *Bosetsurin* who get at the root of terrible hardships of the people first: they are distressed by the upper class. We can say that Casy and the schoolmaster are similar in their social position, because a preacher and a schoolmaster win people's regard and give them some lesson.

Casy watches the tenant farmers' houses in an unusual plight with his own eyes



and hears about their humiliating situation from Muley Graves. These motivate him to go to California with the Joads. He thinks that they who are turned adrift need salvation:

"I gotta see them folks that's gone out on the road. I got a feelin' I got to see them. ... They gonna need help. They got to live before they can afford to die." (GW, Chap.6, p.71)

Namely, Casy believes that it is still his responsibility to preach to the migrant people.

Casy offers himself to be arrested for Tom and is put in jail. The experience in the jail deepens his consideration: there is an event that the prisoners succeed in having some other food instead of the sour beans when all of them protest in chorus. Casy knows that people can overcome those in power if only they join forces; accordingly, he becomes a leader of the strike in Hooper ranch. Peter Lisca says:

What Casy finally learns, in jail after giving himself up to save Tom and Floyd, is that man's spiritual brotherhood must express itself in a social unity, which is why he becomes a labor organizer. <sup>(11)</sup>

His thoughts are incomplete at first, but he is fully aware what the migrant people should do in order to survive and try to persuade them to become one. However, he is killed before the achievement of his purpose.

Tom Joad shows a steady growth of spirit while he listens carefully to Casy

and other migrant people and accumulates considerable experience on the way to California. The growth ultimately leads to his awareness concerning the problem that they face and to his determination to tackle it. The author sometimes implies that Tom steadily moves in the direction of initiation. For example, he suggests something like a strike to Floyd in the camp:

"Well, s'pose them people got together an' says, 'Let 'em (peaches) rot!' Wouldn't be long 'fore the price went up, by God!"  
(*GW*, Chap.20, p.336)

Peter Lisca sums up the process of his initiation in brief:

His [Tom's] first real lesson comes when Casy strikes out against the trooper to save his friend and then gives himself up in his place. The section immediately following is that of the family's stay at a federal migrant camp, and here Tom's education is advanced still further. By the time Casy is killed, Tom is ready for his conversion, which he seals by revenging his mentor.<sup>(12)</sup>

There is no doubt that the last talk with Casy and his death have a decisive influence on Tom's initiation. While Tom hides by himself in the bushes, he has much time for pondering over Casy's words and the circumstances of the migrant people. At last, he makes up his mind to follow in Casy's footsteps:

"I been thinkin' a hell of a lot, thinkin' about our people livin' like pigs, an' the good rich lan' layin' fallow, or maybe one fella with a million acres, while a hundred thousan' good farmers is starvin'. An' I been wonderin' if all our folks got together an' yelled, like them fella yelled, only a few of 'em at the Hooper ranch—"(*GW*, Chap.28, p.571)

Tom realizes that people have immeasurable power when they become united: "Two are better than one.... And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him, and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken." (*GW*, Chap.28, pp.570-71, from the Old Testament) He holds that it is necessary for the migrant people to stand together and face up to the partial authority so that they can work on their own land for their sake—live a decent life.

Genkichi undergoes a similar process and develops his consciousness of social injustice.

One night the schoolmaster comes to Genkichi's house and talks about urban life and the rich who live and work in a city. Besides, he lets Genkichi know that there is a very great difference in circumstances between the rich and the farmers; the rich work the farmers hard, squeeze them and make fools of them. He wants Genkichi to understand the unreasonable structure of society.

「ウンとこさ働かして置いて、その一番いい処をうま々とひつたくつて行くのが地主だから面白いつて、まったく地主に追付くものは一つだつてないさ。処が、奇妙な事もあればあるもんで、誰も地主にちよろまかされているんだてえ事を知らないんだ。それでまだ縁ぎが足りないんだべ、まだ足りないんだべつて、一生懸命働いてるんだ。地主の奴、うしろで、舌ばべろく出して、喜んでるだべよ！」  
(*Bosetsurin*, Chap.5, p.262)

Genkichi has taken actions against the unfair treatment; for instance, he has broken the prohibition and caught many salmons in order to give them to his village people. But he has done nothing further. To put it another way, his idea has been vague enough to do something to improve their circumstances radically. He gives no particular response when he listens to the

schoolmaster. However, the words of the schoolmaster make his idea that they should regain their land from the landowner much clearer.

源吉は然し、やつばり外の百姓達と同じやうに、さういふことを（畑は百姓のもものでなければならぬということ）をたゞばんやりと考へてゐた……が、今度は、源吉自身の経験で、少しづつ形をとつてきた、そしてそのことが、もう一歩思ひ切つた前進をしたのは、校長先生の語したことであるやうだつた。  
(*Bosetsurin*, Chap.6, p.268)

The schoolmaster heads the tenant farmers; they hold a meeting and then attempt to entreat the landowner to reduce the rent. As I have mentioned in chapter 2, they fail in the entreaty and suffer police torture. In addition, Oyoshi, who has been Genkichi's girlfriend, commits suicide in the end after she is seduced by a wealthy college student. These incite Genkichi to perform a daring and furious act— set fire to the landowner's house. It is certain that Casy and the schoolmaster play the same significant role of making Tom and Genkichi realize what to do.

Next, Ma Joad and Genkichi's mother, Seki, should be noted. It is not too much to say that Ma Joad is the greatest female character in the world of John Steinbeck. The depiction of Ma epitomizes that she is definitely the spiritual supporter of the Joads.

She (Ma Joad) seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken. And since old Tom and the children could not know hurt or fear unless she acknowledge hurt and fear.... From her position as healer, her hands had grown sure and cool and quiet; from her position as arbiter she had become as remote and faultless in judgement as a goddess.  
(*GN*, Chap.8, p.100)

She bears up well under difficult circumstances and tries to pave the way for her family's survival. She moves her family to action when they are weak-spirited or pessimistic; in case of need, she defies a police officer with a pan in her hand so as to protect her family. Besides, she unifies and leads her family with Tom after Grampa dies and Pa Joad loses his leadership. The Joads are supported by the love and the indomitable spirit of Ma. Ma Joad possesses great significance of the existence and leaves a very strong and lasting impression on us.

But, on the other hand, there are few remarkable descriptions of Seki in *Bosetsurin*. Moreover, she is reconciled to her present situation and has no mind to revolt against the landowner; in other words, she stands in fear of him. Therefore, she criticizes the schoolmaster and Genkichi for their complaints against the upper class and repeatedly tries to dissuade Genkichi from participating in rebellion.

「地主様に向ふなんて、そつたら恐ろしいことしたつて、巖なことねえ。」

年寄つた百姓達は、どんなことがあろうと、全くそれは文字通り「どんな事」があろうとたゞ「仕方がない。」さう何年も、一何十年も思つてきてゐた。

(*Bosetsurin*, Chap.8, p.274)

Let me devote a little more space to consider two young women, Rose of Sharon in *The Grapes of Wrath* and Oyoshi in *Bosetsurin*, who have something in common. For one thing, they are attracted by city life; Oyoshi runs away from home and falls into reduced circumstances in the city. What is more, they are pregnant; Rose of Sharon is deserted by her husband and Oyoshi by her

boyfriend. However, there is a decided difference in the attitude toward life between these women. Rose of Sharon wants to give birth to a healthy baby, but Oyoshi tries to have an abortion and after all she kills herself. Even after the stillbirth, Rose of Sharon accepts the painful fact and goes on living. She has the will and the power to survive, but Oyoshi does not. The last scene where Rose of Sharon gives her breast milk to a man who is half dead throws a ray of hope on the future of the Joads. Rose of Sharon is the woman who experiences pregnancy, childbirth and saving the man's life. She is notably growing toward the woman who deserves to be the successor to great Ma.

#### Conclusion

We come to the conclusion that Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Kobayashi's *Bosetsurin* share many startling similarities in material, the plot and the characters. They felt a great rage toward capitalism that let the banks and the landowners do anything they liked; it is true that the poverty of people and the high-handed conduct of the ruling class drove them to write their works.

However, it is people's will to survive and their vital power that Steinbeck asserts the most in *The Grapes of Wrath*. This is supported by the Joads' attitudes of living. They have a depth to their idea on living. On the other hand, Kobayashi puts stress on his anger and criticism in *Bosetsurin*. Oyoshi's suicide and incendiarism by Genkichi convey how intense his anger is. We can say that the existence of Oyoshi in the work emphasizes the baseness

of the rich, because they not only exploit the tenant farmers for their profits but also trifle with the women in the working class. It is conceivable that the difference is related to the authors' thought and positions: Kobayashi was a communist, but Steinbeck was not.

There is much room for further discussion about the works of John Steinbeck and Takiji Kobayashi. I would like to continue to do a comparative study of Steinbeck and Japanese literature, inclusive of Kobayashi.

#### Notes

- (1) see. Jackson J. Benson ed.,  
*The True Adventures of John Steinbeck: Writer*,  
(London: Heinemann, 1984), pp.38-45.  
Peter Lisca, "John Steinbeck: A Literary Biography"  
in E. W. Tedlock and C. V. Wicker eds.,  
*Steinbeck and His Critics: A Record of Twenty-Five Years*,  
(Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1957), pp.13-14.  
Peter Lisca, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*,  
(New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1958),  
pp.144-45.  
Anne Loftis, "A Historical Introduction to *Of Mice and Men*"  
in Jackson J. Benson ed., *The Short Novels of John Steinbeck*,  
(Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), p.40.
- (2) see. Peter Lisca, "John Steinbeck: A Literary Biography", p.10.
- (3) see. Otaru Takiji Sai Jikko Iinkai (The executive committee for the Otaru Takiji Festival) ed.,  
*Guide Book: Kobayashi Takiji to Otaru (A Guidebook: Takiji Kobayashi and Otaru)*, (Tokyo: Shin-Nihon Shuppan-sha, 1994), p.13.
- (4) see. Otaru Takiji Sai Jikkou Iinkai ed.,  
*Guide Book: Kobayashi Takiji to Otaru*, p.25.
- (5) see. Katsu Ogasawara, *Shincho Nihon Bungaku Arubamu: Kobayashi Takiji*  
(*Shincho Japanese Literature Album Series: Takiji Kobayashi*),  
(Tokyo: Shincho-sha, 1965), pp.105-06.

Otaru Takiji Sai Jikko Iinkai ed.,

*Guide Book: Kobayashi Takiji to Otaru*, pp.29-33.

- (6) The edition used throughout is John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), *The Red Pony in The Long Valley* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995) and *East of Eden* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992). Hereafter the chapter and page numbers are cited parenthetically with the abbreviation for the title of these works in the text.

*GW: The Grapes of Wrath*

*RP: The Red Pony*

*EE: East of Eden*

- (7) The edition used throughout is Takiji Kobayashi, *Bosetsurin (Snowbreak Wood)* in *Gendai Nihon-bungaku Takji 55: Miyamoto Yuriko · Kobayashi Takiji Shu (Modern Japanese Literature Series No.55: Yuriko Miyamoto and Takiji Kobayashi)*, (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1969). Hereafter the chapter and page numbers are cited parenthetically with the title in the text.
- (8) John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley in Search of America*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p.193.
- (9) John Steinbeck, *The Log from Sea of Cortez*, (London: Mandarin, 1990), p.131.
- (10) The earlier form of this part appeared in *Bulletin of Gakushuin Women's College* No.3, March 31 2001.
- (11) Peter Lisca, *John Steinbeck: Nature and Myth*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1978), pp.102-03.
- (12) Peter Lisca. *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, p.173.